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Author(s)	ITO, Junji
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Bandits in Gori Region, Eastern Georgia, in 1905

Junji Ito

Introduction

Robbers and bandits were called “*khunkhuza*” [after the establishment of the autonomy of villages]. This word came into use after the Russo-Japanese war. The *khunkhuza* meant partisans that attacked the regular army during the war.

People treated *khunkhuza* harshly. No criminal acts escaped impeachment and punishment.

Every criminal lived in fear of awakening the terrible anger of the people¹.

This is a quotation from the memoir of a Georgian revolutionary about the situation of Guria region of western Georgia in 1905. *Khunkhuza* is originally a Chinese word (紅鬍子) that means “red-bearded person” and indicates bandits, originally mounted, in North China. This word was imported into Russian (хунхуз) and came into use at least after the Boxer Rebellion of 1899. Perhaps Georgians took this word from Russian².

The territory of the present republic of Georgia, roughly speaking, consists of two provinces formerly under Imperial Russian rule: the western part or Tiflis province, and the eastern Kutaisi province. Many famous Georgian socialists were born in these two provinces, such as Nikolai Chkheidze, Irakli Tsereteli, and Iosif Stalin. The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) took control of the Georgian nationalist movement. After the October Revolution of 1917, the two provinces declared independence as one single nation, and the Mensheviks ruled the first Republic of Georgia until 1921. The popularity and spread of Social Democratic activity in Georgia became apparent, as many scholars see, after the peasant movement in Guria started in the spring of 1902. Gurian peasants initiated sowing strikes; several Georgian Social Democrats supported the peasants; several committees were

¹ Zhghent'i, Tengiz, *1905 ts'eli guriashi*. (me-3e red.) T'p'ilisi, Shroma, 1931, g. 38.

² For example see *Энциклопедический словарь*. Брокгауз и Ефрон. The word *khunkhuza* appeared in Georgian periodicals at least from the second half of 1904. See for example *Iveria* No. 232, 1904. 10/X.

established under the Caucasus League of the RSDLP; and the peasant movement prevailed outside Guria and joined the labor movements in cities. In 1905, Gurian peasants boycotted government organizations and for a short time achieved autonomy. Their so-called “Gurian Republic” went under the flag of the Social Democrats, later Mensheviks³.

It is interesting to note that Social Democratic periodicals were emphasizing that one of the great advances of peasant autonomy was the disappearance of robbers.

Thieving and other crimes have not been totally extinguished, but have almost completely disappeared. Punishments are, in most cases, rather psychological ones. [...] The Kutaisi province, having been infamous for thieving and robbery, has been completely transformed now, after people ceased to rely on government organizations, and dealt with their own problems by themselves⁴.

In such articles the criminals were indicated as thieves (Georgian *kurdi*) or robbers (*avazaki*), and the word *qachaghi* (or its plural form *qachaghebi*) rarely appears. In Gurian dialect *qachaghi* is called *pirali*, maybe etymologically derived from the same word as the English *pirate*, but this word also rarely appears in revolutionary periodicals.

The word *qachaghi* is roughly equal to the English *bandit*, but with a more ambivalent nuance, used often positively, and sometimes indicating heroic persons. The *qachaghi* is similar to the social bandits of Hobsbawm⁵. Many bandits and bandit-like persons took part in revolutionary movements. Sometimes they were called terrorists or propagandists, but in folklore they continued to be *qachaghi* or (good) bandits. So anti-revolutionary or non-revolutionary bandits were sometimes indicated by the new loanword *khunkhuza*, and they were treated by revolutionaries as mere criminals.

Bandits are one of the most popular themes in Georgian folklore and high literature of the 19th century⁶. After the suppression of peasant movements in 1906, guerrilla warfare was continued by Social Democratic revolutionaries, and they were memorialized by peas-

³ Jones, Stephen Francis, *Socialism in Georgian Colors. The European Road to Social Democracy 1883–1917*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2005; Suny, Ronald Grigor, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, London, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1989; Shanin, Teodor, *Russia, 1905–07; Revolution as a Moment of Truth*, Macmillan, London, 1986; Уратадзе, Григорий, *Воспоминания грузинского социал-демократа* (Gregory Uratadze, *Reminiscences of a Georgian Social Democrat*), Stanford, the Hoover Institution, 1968.

⁴ *Mogzauri* 1905, No. 1.

⁵ Hobsbawm, Eric J., *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, WW Norton, 1959; Id., *Bandits (revised edition)*, New York, the New Press, 2000.

⁶ Rayfield, Donald, *The Literature of Georgia: A History (third, revised and expanded edition)*, London, Garnett Press, 2010; Chikovani, Mikh. (ed.), “Piralis ep’osi guriashi,” *Marksist’uri enat-metsnierebisatvis. ak’ademik’os Nik’o Marisadmi midzghwnili saubileo k’rebuli*, T’pilisi, 1934.

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ants as *qachaghebi*, with their heroic acts and their sometimes supernatural abilities. For example, Datiko Shevardnadze (1877–1909), a granduncle of Eduard, is well known to have had a charmed body, so that he could not be killed by ordinary bullets⁷.

So the name of *qachaghi* was retained for “good” bandits, while “bad” bandits were renamed *kurdi*, *avazaki* and sometimes *khunkhuza*. In western Georgia, where the peasant movements had begun and were most powerful, the re-classification of *qachaghebi* as good terrorists, and bad ones as *khunkhuza*, was relatively successful.

In eastern Georgia, where the Social Democrats’ agitation and participation in peasant movements were relatively weak, activities of bandits in the revolutionary period are more complicated and confusing. Since perestroika, some studies are trying to revise the image of the Social Democrats’ activities. For example, Goguadze emphasizes the bad terrorist side of these activities⁸. But these studies often indict the violent factors of revolutionary movements as a whole, but pay little attention to local differences. In this paper we study bandits and bandit-like activities in eastern Georgia, especially in Gori region, and consider the relation of the images of *qachaghebi* and of modern revolutionaries.

1. Red Guards and propagandists: bandits in Gori region

Once a propagandist (Georgian: *propagandisti*) went around Tiflis villages collecting money. In one village, he ordered the villagers to gather a certain amount of money and to pay it to him immediately. “Sir, where can we find the money?” the miserable peasants replied. “There is no such amount of money here, even if we overturn the whole village and search everywhere”. “So you don’t intend to pay? Then just watch!”, replied the propagandist, as he climbed onto the roof of a house, held up a big fat black *rubber ball* [sic], and screamed, “If you don’t collect the money in one hour, then, you can see this bomb, I’ll throw it from here and the whole village will be burnt to ashes!” Women and children cried, men fell on their knees entreating “Please do not do so, help us, we will get the money in one hour.” After collecting the money, the propagandist then went on to the next village, they say. (*Nishaduri* No. 28, 1908. 24/II)

In January 1908, the Georgian satirical weekly *Nishaduri* (meaning smelling salts, ammonium chloride) began a ten-week series of anonymous articles entitled “Social Democrats in villages”, condemning their violent activities. *Nishaduri* was a periodical leaning towards the Georgian Socialist-Federalist Party, whose position was inclined to the Russian Socialist-

⁷ Khintibidze, Ant’on, *Guruli Piralebi*, Tbilisi, 1938; Id., *1905–1907 ts’lebis revolutsiis da reaktsiis p’eriodis mebrdzolebi*, Tbilisi, Sabch’ota sakartvelo, 1989.

⁸ Goguadze, Emzari, “T’erorist’ebi da t’erorist’uri akt’ebi revolutsiur guriashi” *Sakhalkho Ganatleba* Nos. 11, 15, 7/July, 1990.

Revolutionary Party⁹. In articles, they claimed that Social Democrats under the flag of RSDLP, powerful and influential in whole Georgian villages, had in fact oppressed villagers. According to the articles, they consisted of Red Guards (*tsiteli razmeli* or *razmeri*) and propagandists. Red Guards were vigilance committees whose members had been organized mainly in 1905 in Georgian villages by Social Democrats. By the word “propagandists” they mean rather educated activists, many of whom had studied in cities and returned to villages, often to their home villages.

Nishaduri saw the years after 1905 as the storm of reactionary movements, and opposed several policies of the imperial government. But on the other hand, it claimed that “even the enemy of the people has never acted so brutally as the ‘friend of the people’”, and in its articles peasants broke “two years silence” and confessed the truth of the situation in the villages (*Nishaduri* 1908, No. 24).

According to the articles, Red Guards had become a kind of secondary monarch, enforcing under threat the requisition of provisions, the collection of revolutionary taxes, and the corrupt redistribution of lands. Sometimes Red Guards raped village women, and a document was found ordering the offer of women, signed by the Social Democratic organization in Gori (*Id.*, No. 26). They committed kidnappings for ransom and dealt in stolen goods, and under the flag of the Social Democratic party the deeds of plunder and robbery were repeated. Many bandits also claimed to be revolutionaries. Some of them actually became bodyguards of landmen, as in Borjomi, a town in Gori region (*Id.*, No. 27).

As the Red Guards also reigned over the villages as spiritual leaders, moral degradation spread. Profanities, such as burying icons and desecrating holy places, were seen everywhere. For example, near Tskhinvali in Gori there was a major meeting for atheistic propaganda, where many icons were gathered and set on fire. However, soon afterwards there was a hailstorm, which was interpreted as the punishment of heaven on these villages (*Id.*, No. 29). Furthermore, the propagandists encouraged villagers to commit incest, such as marriage between siblings or cousins.

The People’s Courts often resorted to capital punishment for petty offenses, and many innocent victims were convicted as guilty of espionage through mere mistakes or false testimony. The bodies of condemned villagers were left to lie in fields, and funeral services for them were prohibited. In one village, an elderly “spy” was made to dig his own grave, where he was buried with his head protruding above the soil. His nose, ears, tongue and lips were cut off, and then he was left to die (*Id.*, No. 34). One Red Guard always carried a finger of one of his victims, and at times he would show it to others, boasting of his reckless valor

⁹ For the character of these periodicals, see: Абрамишвили, А. З., *Грузинская Периодика. (Аннотированный каталог грузинской периодики хранящейся в ГПБ им. М. Е. Салтыкова-Щедрина)*, Тбилиси, Тбилисский государственный университет, 1968.

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by touching the finger to his lips. Sometimes the Red Guards would hold a banquet with the heads of their victims decorating the tables (No. 30).

Many of these articles show the names of villages, informants, and victims just by their initials, so identification is often difficult. But as we see above, almost all the articles that pinpoint the location write that these brutal activities happened in Gori. We can reasonably assume that the other articles also refer to Gori, or at least to eastern Georgia, because in western Georgia the Social Democrats exercised more effective control, and therefore *Nishaduri* correspondents probably experienced greater difficulty in contacting villagers. Some official reports say that the inhabitants of Gori sympathized with the bandits, and coordinated their actions¹⁰. Some police reports refer to the acts of the People's Court in Gori¹¹. Revolutionary movements in Gori were, as we see below, stronger than others in eastern Georgia.

Nishaduri supposes the cause of such a brutal reign of the Red Guards to be as follows:

Why did it happen? Because young, ignorant, uncultured people had become the active leaders of the revolution. They are always talented only at thieving and robbing: as before the beginning of the movement, so at present. Severally, imprisoned thieves, robbers, ex-prisoners from Siberia, tenants of villages, some bodyguards that had mastered murder, injury and plunder, forest guards, cooks, artisans, workers, crooked shopkeepers—all this riff-raff was formed into a pack of propagandists and Red Guards, leading the movements of villagers, upsetting arbitrarily the hearts, heads and pockets of peasants.

(*Nishaduri* No. 29, 1908, 2/III.)

In the years 1907 and 1908, cracks appeared between the Georgian Social Democrats and other parties. Among Social Democrats too, cracks between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had become clear. On June 3, 1907, following the revision of the election laws, the second imperial *Duma* was dissolved, with Social Democratic representatives being arrested. The number of representatives from “Georgia”, namely Tiflis province, Kutaisi province, Batumi province and Tiflis city, was reduced from 8 to 3. The weight of the landowners’ vote increased. For all that, in the election of the third *Duma* on October, two out of three representatives elected were Social Democrats: Mensheviks, or Chkheidze and Gegechkoli¹².

Soon after the dissolution of the second *Duma*, Bolsheviks in Georgia strengthened their

¹⁰ Цагарейшвили, Ш. В. (ред.) *Революция 1905–1907гг. в Грузии: сборник документов*. Тбилиси, 1956, с. 674.

¹¹ For example, on December 15, 1905 a suspected murderer in Khidistavi was arrested and killed by the Social Democratic inhabitants of Gori city. *Sakartvelos saero ark'ivi* ф. 113, оп. 2с. No. 218.

¹² Suny, Ronald Grigor, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*. Bloomington and Indianapolis / Stanford, Cal., Indiana U. P. / Hoover Institution P., 1988, p. 174.

terrorist activities. The infamous bombing of a cash transport wagon took place on July 23 under the command of Ter-Petrosian, the right-hand man of the young Stalin. On August 30, Iria Chavchavadze was assassinated. He was the greatest writer in 19th century Georgia, and chief editor of the daily *Iveria*, which had the largest circulation of Georgian periodicals. His political thought was rather anti-Social Democrat but more nationalistic, so his activities were also seen as dangerous by some members of the imperial government. His murderers have not yet been identified, but in those days there was a widespread rumour that he was killed by Bolshevik terrorists, and that their plan for his assassination was ignored by the police¹³. His death affected positively the expansion of the Social Democratic parties. Opponents saw these events as symptomatic of the despotism of the Social Democrats. From its first issue, *Nishaduri* ran many articles and caricatures condemning the dictatorship and the claims of infallibility of the party.

The daily *Azri*, (Thought), a Menshevik paper, protested against these articles. In an anonymous article dated February 19, it charged that all the events written about in *Nishaduri* articles, except one, were not dated, and the location was unidentified, so the entire content of these articles was dubious¹⁴. To this article the daily *Isari* (Arrow) responded. In the issue dated February 21, Ia Ekaradze wrote an article supporting *Nishaduri*. He wrote that in his opinion the theories of Marx and his good followers are not bad, but that he himself had experienced the dictatorship of the Red Guards in the summer of 1906 in a village near Tskhinvali of Gori region. In this summer, the Social Democrat organization in the village was on the verge of dissolution as a result of its suppression by the police. The revolutionary movement was beginning to spin out of control. Ekaradze, inclined himself to the Socialist Federalist Party, proposed Mindiashvili, a Social Democrat leader of the village, to wipe out “thieves and banditry factors seen in the fighters against the people”. But Mindiashvili was killed by ex-comrade “Red Guards and propagandists” who intended to become the new leaders of the movement, and Ekaradze himself barely escaped from the village.

Azri further replied to Ekaradze:

Everyone knows that many Red Guards have become bandits after the victory of the reactionary forces. But as to the propagandists, Mr. Ia Ekaradze and *Nishaduri* are slanderous in writing that the propagandists have changed into bandits. If you find a single propagandist who became a hooligan, please let us know his name.

¹³ Qorashvili, Guram, *Tsitsamris t'ragediis saidumro*, Tbilisi, 2004; Sigua, Aleksandre, *Vin mok'la ilia ch'avch'avadze*, Tbilisi, Merani, 1991; Gugushvili, P'at'a, *Ilia ch'avch'avadzis mk'vleloba: sagamomdzieblo masalebi*, Tbilisi, Salhelgami, 1938.

¹⁴ In fact, all the villages cited in the first 3 articles, issued before the criticism of *Azri*, are shown by their initials. Regions are referred to 3 times, “Borjomi valley, Gori region” twice, “Gori region” once.

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It is also a slander to say, as Mr. Ekaradze wrote, that Social Democratic organizations have taken no measures against the Red Guards that had become bandits. (*Azri* No. 22, 1908. 23/II)

The anonymous writer continues that in September, 1906, the party resolved to disarm the ex-members that had taken to banditry. He admitted that many bandits had assumed the name of “RSDLP activist”, but claimed that the party was not responsible for their activities. Ekaradze again criticized this article, and the dispute continued, but for our present purposes the conclusion of the dispute is not important. It is interesting that this Social Democratic writer himself admitted the corruption of the Red Guards. Moreover, in his writing the word bandit (*qachaghi*) carries no positive meaning.

A *Nishaduri* writer also used the word *qachaghi* ironically.

Next, let us see what these lords [propagandists] did to villages and their inhabitants! They are not true bandits, so they do not assault some person on the roads and leave after depriving him of his property. They are idealist bandits, preaching excellent ideals to the people, but on the other hand they never forget to line their own pockets. (*Nishaduri* No. 29)

Both the writers of *Nishaduri* and *Azri* thought that bandits were mere criminals, and that the peasants did not support their activities. This is strange, considering that in western Georgia many revolutionaries were applauded in folklore as bandit heroes. We must take into account the fact that both periodicals referred to the situation of eastern Georgia. One article points out that all the six events Ekaradze mentioned took place in Gori region (*Nishaduri* No. 27), but no further attention is paid to regional differences.

In western Georgia too, sometimes revolutionary bandits and villagers were in conflict¹⁵. But if we compare this with the description of the “Gurian republic” of 1905, the revolutionary activists in the articles of *Nishaduri* and Ekaradze have one strikingly different character. They acted as if they had been militant atheists. Previously in Guria the People’s Court participants took an oath before some holy icon. Atheist Social Democrat leaders, being afraid of losing peasant support, refrained from harsh atheist propaganda, though they attacked the corruption of the church¹⁶. It is supposed that in Gori the course of the peasant movement differed from that in western Georgia.

Elisabedashvili recalls that in Gori there was an exceptionally revolutionary situation, not seen elsewhere in eastern Georgia¹⁷. Red Guards and propagandists in this region were

¹⁵ Goguadze, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Ito, Junji, “The Peasant Movements and the Georgian intellectuals”, *Seiyo Shigaku*, No. 195, 1999, pp. 1–21. [in Japanese]

¹⁷ Elisabedashvili, Giorgi. “Revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashshi.” *Revolutsiis Matiane* No. 2(19), 1928, c. 73.

egregious. Next, we must study the development of revolutionary movements in Gori.

2. Revolutionary movements in Gori region and villages.

Stalin, or Iosif Jugashvili, was born in Gori. Several other Social Democrats, like Stalin, were born in Gori, and studied in seminaries. Among them, Rado Ketskhoveri, famous as the founder of the first underground Georgian printing shop, was born in Tskhinvali and studied in the Tiflis seminary¹⁸. Ter-Petrosian, an Armenian, was also born in Gori and studied with the young Stalin. Elisabedashvili, one of the founders of the revolutionary organization in Gori, was born into the family of a village priest in this region, and found Marx in the Tiflis seminary¹⁹.

According to the national census of 1897, the population of Gori region was about 180,000, consisting of 120,000 Georgians, 50,000 Ossetians, 5,600 Armenians, and 4,300 Russians, most of whom were descendants of exiled Molokans²⁰. The literacy rate in villages was 8.7% for men and 8.1% for women, a little lower than the average of Tiflis province for men, and a little higher for women²¹.

Guria, the center of revolutionary Georgian peasant movements, had a strikingly high literacy rate of 29.1% for men. Besides, near the region there was an important oil port, Batumi. As for the literacy rate, or enlightenment and modernization movements around petty intellectuals in villages, the situation in Gori was not the same as in Guria. However, there was a locomotive depot in Gori, where temporary workers from nearby villages could take part in labor movements and then go back home with their experiences, similar to the situation in Guria.

Gori region is located along the Likhi range, bordering eastern and western Georgia. Through Gori ran the Transcaucasus Railway, connecting the Baku oilfield and the port of Batumi. Mikhailovo Depot lay in Khashuri, a city at the foot of the range. From Khashuri a branch line ran to Borjomi, the source of the famous mineral water. Some rail workshops existed in Khashuri and Borjomi. River transport still played an important role even after the railroad opened alongside the rivers, and both required many workers for loading and shipping. Some villagers went to Tiflis, the center of Russian imperial rule, to find jobs. As

¹⁸ *1917 ts'lamde daghup'ul revoliutsionerta khsovnebidan*. Tbilisi, 1923, g. 9–10.

¹⁹ *Revolutsiuri modzraobis moghvats'eni sakartveloshi: biografiabis k'rebuli*. Tbilisi, 1961, g. 222–223. Another revolutionary, Grigor Parlادze, was also born into a priestly family in Gori region, and studied in a seminar. *Id.*, g. 454–455. Archil Japaridze, the representative in the first and second Duma from Tiflis province, was a member of the gentry of Gori region. *1917 ts'lamde daghup'ul revoliutsionerta khsovnebidan*, g. 45–46.

²⁰ *Кавказский Календарь на 1907, Тифлисъ, 1906, III отд., с. 131.*

²¹ *Id.*, II отд., с. 329.

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in Guria, Social Democratic movements in villages were initiated by temporary workers and intellectuals from the cities.

In April 1902, during the reconstruction of a railway bridge near Aghara station between Gori and Khashuri, May Day was secretly celebrated for the first time in Gori region by Social Democrats. About 60 persons attended this May Day meeting, including around 15 peasants. Of these, 3 came from Batumi, where aggressive labour movements had already been developed. Elisabedashvili returned from Tiflis, where the preparations to celebrate May Day had been prevented by police²². After this meeting, propaganda activities were started by small circles of workers.

In June the peasant movement in Guria started. By the summer its influence was seen in many villages throughout western Georgia. By August a rumor had reached villages of Gori region, saying that in Kutaisi province (western Georgia) the church tax had already been abolished by the peasant movement, which was not true²³.

In that same summer student movements in the Gori seminary became more active. The Governor of Tiflis province concluded that circles of these seminary students were the main agitators in villages²⁴, but according to Elisabedashvili, most propagandists were emigrants from Tiflis or Batumi. As of that winter, illegal newspapers were brought in from Baku and dispersed among villagers. Silivestr Jibradze from Guria and Ter-Petrosian from Gori participated in this illegal traffic²⁵. In the spring of 1903, an Ossetian circle was established for distributing propaganda to Ossetian forest workers.

A rumor spread among peasants that *ertoba* [unity] was coming, and that soon they would be saved²⁶. Later the word *ertoba* became one of the main slogans of the Social Democrats, sometimes indicating the 1905 revolution itself. But in 1902 this word was taken by peasants to mean some kind of religious salvation.

In 1903 the labor movement in Mikhailovo Depot suffered bloody repression. During the first days of July, the so-called general strikes of South Russia started, initially in Baku and Odessa, and then spreading to Tiflis, Batumi, Kiev, and other industrial cities of the north and east coasts of the Black Sea²⁷. On July 14, the name day of the emperor, workers tore

²² Elisabedashvili, "Revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.", g. 78–79.

²³ Maghlak'elidze, S. (ed.) "Glekhta modzraoba sakartveloshi 1905 ts'lis revolutsiis ts'in." *Saistorio Moambe* 10, 1959, g. 285–290.

²⁴ Id., c. 294; "Крестьянское движение в западной Закавказьи в 1902–1904 гг." *Красный Архив* No. 99, 1940/II, c. 95.

²⁵ Kerech'ashvili, Nest'ori. "Rogor daits'qo revolutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi." *Revolutsiis Matiane* No. 2(15), 1926, g. 73.

²⁶ Elisabedashvili, "Revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.", g. 85.

²⁷ Ратова, С. А. "Всеобщая стачка в 1903 году на Кавказе и Черноморском побережье", *Былое* No. 6, 1907, c. 97–117.

down the imperial flag from the depot. From the beginning, the labor movement in the depot could not control the activities of its own members in the economic arena. The police fired at the marching workers, and 14 were killed²⁸. The bodies of the victims were transported to their homes, and their funerals turned into meetings for anti-government propaganda, as had been seen in villages of western Georgia.

In western Georgia, a bloody strike in Batumi followed the return of many workers (or their bodies) to their home villages, many of which were located in Guria, where those workers then took the initiative in the peasant movement. In Gori, revolutionaries tried to follow the example of Guria. In that summer an activist named Samson Pataria arrived from Guria, but unfortunately he fell ill with tuberculosis and died in the following spring²⁹. After the bloody strike, a regional organization was established and many activists visited Gori, but the main object of their propaganda was the workers.

With all that, the villages of Gori first responded to the news of the peasant movements in western Georgia. At the beginning of 1905 the post of viceroy of Transcaucasia was restored, and Volontsov-Dashkov assumed the position. He stopped the dispatch of the army to Guria, instead sending inspectors to listen to the voices of Gurian peasants. Several correspondents accompanied the inspectors and legally reported the claims of Gurian peasants from the latter half of February. These reports became a spark to inflame villages in eastern Georgia, and the first resonance was heard in Tskhinvali.

On March 9, a great meeting was held in Tskhinvali and delegates were elected, among whom were Georgians, Ossetians, Jews and Armenians, including several women. A mass demonstration marched to the bazaar, singing songs and shouting the slogan *ertoba*. On March 13, 15,000 attended a meeting held in the precincts of a church in Dovghrishi village. They formulated their demands after discussion in Georgian and Ossetian. On the 17th, a meeting was also held in Shindishi village. On that same day, the inhabitants of Sagarejo closed the school, the hospital, the pharmacy and the tax office of their village. On the 20th, in Mejvriskhevi village, after the funeral of a woman, 200 Georgians and Ossetians resolved to present demands to their landlords. In several villages peasants assaulted the houses of landlords, while some invaded village offices and destroyed documents³⁰.

²⁸ Elisabedashvili counts the victims as 14, but the police report counts 12 dead and 14 injured, 3 of whom only slightly. Perhaps 2 injured workers died later. Judging from the names and surnames, all the victims except one Russian were Georgians or Ossetians. According to Elisabedashvili, just one victim was a peasant. Elisabedashvili, "Revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.", g. 82–84; *Всёобщая стачка на юге России в 1903 году, сборник документов*, Москва, 1938, с. 63–70.

²⁹ Kerech'ashvili, "Rogor daits'qo revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.", g. 74. Elisabedashvili wrote that Pataria was dispatched in the spring of 1902. He may have been mistaken here. Elisabedashvili, "Revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.", g. 79–80.

³⁰ *Mogzauri* No. 11, 1905, 27/III.

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Their actions were at first sight similar to those of western Georgia, but they acted under a different flag. In Guria, the red flag had been popular as the symbol of the peasant movement before 1905. But the mass demonstration in Tskhinvali was guided by a church flag. In Dovghrisi and in Shindishi, meetings started with the ringing of church bells. As to schools, in Guria many teachers distributed illegal newspapers, while many small libraries were closed in 1902 by the government as being hotbeds of treason. In Gori, on the contrary, schools were seen as the enemy of the peasants, who themselves closed them. The influence of Social Democratic intellectuals was limited.

In July, two regiments of Red Guards (*ts'iteli razmi*, красносотенцы) were established by some members of RSDLP in Gori. The southern regiment consisted of 50 members, headed by Noe Khomeriki. Born in Imereti region of western Georgia, he was engaged in the illegal printing shop in Batumi, and in 1903 became one of the founders of the RSDLP Imereti committee. His nickname in Gori was *Khunkhuza*³¹. The word *khunkhuza*, at that time, could be used positively or ironically by a Red Guard leader. Besides the regiments, a group was also organized to supply arms. The members of the group made bombs in collaboration with members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

Two regiments were necessary, because noblemen also organized regiments. In Ossetia, one noble, Giorgi Amirakhvali, organized the so-called Black Hundreds, who were superior to the Red Guards in their armaments³². On August 25, Vano Magladze, a Red Guard member, was killed by a *qachaghi*³³. This anonymous *qachaghi* was later redesignated as a mere robber or spy in historical writings³⁴, because the word *qachaghi* had officially become a word reserved for heroes.

In Gori, the Social Democrats attempted to enlist and control bandits, but their efforts were unsuccessful.

Conclusion

Ter-Petrosian distinguished between the activities of learned party members (terrorists) and those of “politically unconscious” bandits³⁵. Many Social Democrats tried to avoid using

³¹ Kerech'ashvili, “Rogor daits'qo revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.”, g. Dumbadze, Lado. “Chemi mogonebani batomshi revoliutsionuri mushaobis shesakheb 1901–1902 ts'ts'.” *Revolutsiis Matiane* 1926, No. 1(14), g. 96. After the revolution of 1917, Noe Khomeriki became a cabinet minister in the Menshevik republic of Georgia.

³² Elisabedashvili, “Revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.”, g. 86.

³³ Elisabedashvili, “Revoliutsionuri modzraoba goris mazrashi.”, g. 84.

³⁴ *Revolutsiuri modzraobis moghvats'eni sakartveloshi*, g. 383.

³⁵ Медведева-Тер-Петросян, С. Ф. *Герой Революций* (“товарищ Камо”). Москва и Ленинград, 1925, с. 30.

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the word *qachaghi*. Activities of bandits often transgressed against the assumption of Social Democrat activities.

In western Georgia, where Social Democrats dominated the peasant movement, bandits were officially transformed into revolutionaries or mere robbers. In the peasant memory, some revolutionaries retained the features of bandits. In eastern Georgia, especially in Gori, bandits lived their own lives, and some of them disguised themselves as revolutionaries.